

*(chauffer, lacrosse mom, NASA/GSFC, wife, cook, field trip chaperone...)*

On my mark, get set, GO! Wait a minute...why didn't I think about the rest of my life when I chose my major??? We are faced with choices when it comes to balancing family and work responsibilities. Research fields in particular are demanding on time and riddled with deadlines. Pressure on all fronts can make it difficult to be honest with ourselves and set the priorities that suit our own situations, and so we struggle to keep from being thrown off treadmills of our own creation. Are you happy with your own treadmill run? I've tried my best to find the right treadmill settings for me and for my family...and I'm still trying! Here is a light-hearted look from the astronomer/wife/mom point of view.

I was not offended. Why should I be? No one likes a person who is just *waiting* to be offended. Besides, I would have thought exactly the same thing! I was so used to working around men that, when I showed up for a summer position at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, it did not strike me at all as odd that such a question would be asked. That was quite a while ago...and the landscape has changed quite a bit in the science community!

I had the opportunity to telecommute back before telecommuting was common. It was an option that kept me from quitting altogether at the time. It also added its own pressure...like getting phone calls about Jupiter data analysis only a few days after giving birth! The lines between work and home blurred. It was great to be able to launch a radiative transfer analysis of a high-resolution spectrum and then step into the kitchen and stir whatever was on the stove. It was also easy to deceive myself into thinking that I was spending time with my family when my mind really was elsewhere. Laptops and high speed connections have given us even more flexibility, but they can also tempt us to work all day on site as well as all evening at home if we are not careful. It's a delicate balance that is advantageous to both our families and colleagues...without *we're there, you're not!*

There was a gap between my M.S. and Ph.D. and at one point, with dirty dishes in the sink and two kids at home, I found myself back in school. And, I found myself sitting at the dining room table doing my homework...next to my daughter...who was doing her homework. OK, I know you are never too old to go back to school, but *really!*

OUCH!!!! I thought I had done a pretty decent job with the treadmill settings before my daughter asked that question, but WOW that hurt! Kids will take everything you have to give. However, keep in mind that your colleagues are big kids...they will also take everything you have to give! Be content in your own mind that you are giving sufficiently to each. Neither will ever be fully satisfied, but you should be!

OUCH OUCH!!!! I felt like my husband was twisting the knife when he said that! Don't get me wrong, he is *super* supportive of me, but he does not travel much for his job and he likes it that way. Although he *loves* to travel, he would much rather travel with our family. I, on the other hand, do not like to travel, but I do like the "mom break" that an observing run gives me. A work trip can easily turn into a guilt trip, though. Should I feel guilty that lack of oxygen, lack of sleep, long hours, and potentially dangerous conditions are an absolute vacation for me? OK, we all have our own preferences when it comes to recreation (*especially* scientists), but moms (and dads) DO need to take breaks. At least that's what my fellow moms have assured me!



So I made a goofy YouTube music video with my colleagues that was well-received by ground-based astronomers. When my son heard that I might use it in a talk that I was to give to his class at school, he panicked! My son was embarrassed by me. I had therefore fulfilled my role as a parent!

If you are a parent and a scientist, you *already* have two strikes against you in the "coolness" department. So, take advantage of that fact! Give talks and judge science fairs at your kid's school (and other schools). Scientists are encouraged to do public outreach, so why not start with your kid's school? If your schedule is flexible, help out in the classroom or attend field trips. Sometimes there are tasks that can be done after hours that can serve the school. It should not always fall to the other parents, so if at all possible keep that treadmill setting where it will allow participation in your kid's school. After all, your kids are only young once, the schools are where future scientists will come from...and you too will be able to fulfill your role as a parent by embarrassing your kid!

I just about panicked when my daughter said that! "Sweetie, be a dentist! It's much more practical and you won't have to beg for money to cover your salary!" Why would I not encourage her to do what I love to do? I'm still trying to figure that out, but more often than not we do the opposite. We tell prospective scientists about exciting advances in the field, newsworthy research and our own cool projects without being honest about the practical side of research: proposing for funding, travel, publish or perish, conferences, review panels...a research career often does not recognize evenings and weekends. Helping prospective scientists to be well-informed should not be thought of as discouragement. Rather, it should enable them to have a vision for what that treadmill might be like *before* they step onto it.

I say that in jest when my kids do something silly. However, I don't EVER want to mean it. Everyone has their own situation that they must address and their own choices to make when it comes to setting the speed and incline on the treadmill, both moms and dads. My hope is that you will find the settings on your own treadmill that will work for you!

[illegible]